



Santa Cruz Countywide Threat Assessment Plan

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*A Plan for Santa Cruz County Schools to assess and respond
effectively to students who threaten violence*



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Components to be Included in the Comprehensive Safe Schools Plan

As with all schools in California, Santa Cruz County schools are required to develop a comprehensive school safety plan, per California Education Code sections 32280-32289. In addition to the required components in the education code, each school in Santa Cruz County will include the following components in their Comprehensive Safe Schools Plan:

Overview of Santa Cruz County Threat Assessment Plan and Protocol

The purpose of this plan is to provide practical guidelines for school-based teams within Santa Cruz County to conduct threat assessments of students who threaten to commit an act of violence. The goals of threat assessment are twofold:

- To maintain a safe environment by preventing an act of violence from taking place.
- To resolve student conflicts or problems that underlie threatening behavior.

These conditions require an organized, school-wide approach that involves ALL school staff. This protocol is for use when dealing with threats made by students. When threats are made by adults, law enforcement will be called immediately.

I. What Is a Threat?

A threat is an expression of intent to harm someone. Threats can be spoken, written, or expressed in gestures. Threats may be direct (I'm going to beat you up) or indirect (I'm going to get him). When in doubt about whether a student's behavior is a threat, evaluate it as a threat.

A threat assessment is conducted when a person (or persons) threatens to commit a violent act or engages in behavior that appears to threaten an act of violence.

II. Threats are categorized and described as follows:

A. Transient threats

Transient threats are statements that do not express a lasting intent to harm someone. Transient threats are intended as either figures of speech or reflect feelings that dissipate in a short period. All transient threats end in an apology or explanation that makes it clear the threat is over.

B. Substantive threats

Substantive threats are statements that express a continuing intent to harm someone. They indicate a desire and raise concerns that someone is in danger of being harmed beyond the immediate incident. A threat not retracted or resolved should be considered substantive. A serious substantive threat usually involves a fight or a threat to hit someone or harm someone without the use of a weapon. A substantive threat that involves using a weapon such as a firearm or a knife will be classified as very serious because of the potential for severe injury.

III. Evaluation of Threats and the Threat Assessment Team

Each school has formed its own threat assessment team utilizing staff that is available to them. Typically the team will be comprised of a school administrator, a law enforcement liaison, a mental health professional, certificated and classified staff. The team will evaluate the threat, decide if the threat is transient, substantive, serious substantive, or very serious substantive.

A Threat is Reported to the Principal.

Step 1. Evaluate the threat.

***When the possibility of a substantive serious threat exists, consult with law enforcement before proceeding with the threat assessment.**

- Obtain a specific account of the threat by interviewing the student who made the threat, the recipient of the threat, and other witnesses.
- Write down the exact contents of the threat and statements made by each party.
- Consider the circumstances in which the threat was made and the student's intentions.
- Consider notifying Law Enforcement.

Step 2. Decide whether the threat is transient or substantive

- Consider the criteria for transient versus substantive threats.
- Consider the student's age, credibility, and previous discipline history.

The threat is clearly transient.

The threat is substantive or the threat's meaning is not clear.

Step 3. Respond to a transient threat.

- Typical responses may include a reprimand, parent notification, or another disciplinary action. The student may be required to make amends and attend mediation or counseling.
- Consider consulting law enforcement.
- If appropriate, Proceed to Step 7

Step 4. Decide whether the substantive threat is serious or very serious.

A *serious* threat involves a threat to assault someone ("I'm gonna beat that kid up"). A ***very serious* threat** involves the use of a weapon or is a threat to kill, rape, or inflict severe injury on someone.

The threat is serious.

The threat is very serious.

Step 5. Respond to a serious substantive threat.

- Consult law enforcement.
- Take immediate precautions to protect potential victims, including notifying the victim and the victim's parents.
- Notify the student's parents.
- Refer the student for counseling, dispute mediation, or another appropriate intervention.
- Discipline the student as appropriate to the severity and chronicity of the situation.
- If appropriate, Proceed to Step 7

Step 6. Respond to a very serious substantive threat (conduct a safety evaluation).

- Consult law enforcement
- Take immediate precautions to protect potential victims, including notifying the victim and the victim's parents.
- Notify the student's parents.
- Begin extended mental health inquiry of the student.
- Discipline the student as appropriate.

If appropriate

Step 7. Implement a safety plan.

- Complete a written plan.
- Maintain contact with the student.